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AUTHOR Davidson, Phebe; Stephen, Naomi
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ABSTRACT

Revision, based on a grasp of intertextuality (the relation of texts to one another and the writer's locus relative to her own text and the text of others) and the social nature of all discourse, is a larger process that can be observed in any single piece of writing. This larger conception of revision is a natural outgrowth of "reflexive" or "self-referential" writing--writing in which the writer is constantly defining herself or himself through the act of writing. By doing so, developing writers become aware of themselves and their own positions relative to the discourse community which they must join. A serial reading of texts (nine writing assignments) produced successively over the course of a semester by the same student illustrates this development. A significant repetitive pattern within these assignments is the emphasis on self-referentiality. The implicit pedagogical expectation is that she will perforce internalize the corollary texts and learn to manipulate the conventions at work in her own text, rather than remain subservient to them. The importance of reflexive techniques in personal narrative assignments is that even as the writer is asked to revise her experience in light of new contexts, she is also required to revise her vision of herself. Yet a shift from the narrative to exposition is crucial for a developing writer. An authorial self emerges, created through the reflexive process of revising not merely text but also the writer's position in the social and discourse communities. (MM)

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REFLEXIVE PROCESS AND THE DEVELOPING WRITER

Phebe Davidson
Rutgers University

&

Naomi Stephen
Yale University

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REFLEXIVE PROCESS
AND THE DEVELOPING WRITER

Phebe Davidson & Naomi Stephen

In an earlier paper titled "Toward a Social Theory of Revision" (ERIC, 1989) we argued that revision is a continuous process occurring throughout any given piece of writing from inception of idea to completion of text: that revision is literally a re-seeing of the material at hand from a new viewpoint and in an enlarged context. We further argued that effective revision, i.e. revision that satisfies the expectations aroused in readers by the text, is dependent upon the writer's perception of herself as a social being writing for other social beings, and upon her perception of the formal and interpretive conventions at work in the universe of texts. In support of this theory we offered the successive changes made in a single text by a student writer grappling with the problem of locating herself in a discourse and compared her revision process with that of an experienced writer already aware of the discourse community.

In both instances, we examined revisions of single texts in terms of their social, intertextual surrounds in order to demonstrate the substantive differences between successful and unsuccessful revision. In this paper, we would argue that revision, based on a grasp of intertextuality (the relation of texts to one another and the writer's locus relative to her own text and the texts of others) and the social nature of all discourse (that quality which enables one being to communicate with others) is in fact a larger process than can be observed in any single piece of writing; thus, we would

further argue that this larger conception of revision, in which the earlier definitions of the revision process and the conditions essential to it remain unchanged, is a natural outgrowth of what we will call reflexive or self-referential writing. By this we mean writing in which the writer is constantly turning back upon herself, defining herself through the act of writing. By so doing, she becomes aware of herself and her own position relative to the discourse community which she must join.
We contend that this larger idea of revision can be documented by the serial reading of texts produced successively over the course of a semester by the same student whose work we had treated in our earlier paper. In treating these essays as a seriatum, we do not pretend to prove a universal case for reflexive process, nor do we pretend to examine every aspect of the student's work. Instead, we offer readings from representative texts in the development of a student writer.

Exclusive of the mid-term and final examinations, the student was given nine writing assignments, some with corollary readings, over the course of the semester. In these assignments the student was asked:

1. to write a personal narrative of an event which formed a significant turning point in her life.

2. to revise and re-submit the first narrative

3. to write an essay detailing her reflections on college life.

   Corollary readings:

   Caroline Bird "College is a Waste of Time and Money"

William Zinsser "College Pressures"

4. to return again to the first narrative and to revise it once again.

5. to generate an expository essay on the subject of death.

   Corollary readings:

   Lewis Thomas, "The Long Habit"
   Elisabeth Kubler-Ross "On the Fear of Death"
   James F. Fries "Aging, Natural Death, and the Compression of Morbidity"

6. to write a humorous narrative.

7. to generate a theory of humor based on textual analysis of humorous narratives by her peers.

   Corollary readings:

   E.B. White, "Some Remarks on Humor"
   Christopher Fry, "Laughter"
   M. Smith, "Damper"

8. The student was asked to develop a reading of M. Smith's "Damper" based on the point of view of Fry, White, and Smith and on her own theorizing about the nature of humor.

9. The student was asked to develop a theory of identity based upon engagement with the corollary texts.

   Corollary readings:

   Naomi Weisstein, "Psychology Constructs the Female"
   Willard Gaylin, "What You See is the Real You"
   Jean-Paul Sartre, "Existentialism"
   Johnna Benson, "Rotten at the Core" (in STUDENT WRITERS AT WORK, Bedford/St. Martins, NY, 1986)

(With the one noted exception, all readings are in the NORTON READER, *SIXTH EDITION.* New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1984)

A significant repetitive pattern within these assignments is the emphasis on self-referentiality. The writer is consistently expected to define herself within her work, and

is not allowed to rest at the level of mere summary. The implicit pedagogical expectation is that she will perforce internalize the corollary texts and learn to manipulate the conventions at work in her own text, rather than remain subservient to them, or more simply to master the forms of which she is initially the servant.

For purposes of discussion, the assignments can be considered in two groups. In the first group, comprised of assignments 1 through 4, the student is asked primarily to revise the same piece of work; the element of personal narrative is the unifying thread all her efforts. In the second group, comprised of assignments 5-9, the student is asked to work in a more analytical mode, in which the authorial identity established in the experiential narrative mode is given more scope to explore and generalize as it becomes more vigorously engaged with the accessible textual community.

Thus, in Assignment #1 the student was asked to detail her own experience, and in Assignment #2 to return to it again. This sort of second revision has an advantage in that the student has been given some opportunity to situate herself in the class and with respect to the instructor rather than having to refine in a vacuum her view of the events she narrates. At the same time she must examine her own narrative stance (her locus relative to the larger society of readers and to her own (text). This reflexive activity is again brought into play in Assignment #3. Here the student needed to further develop her narrative stance in order to reflect coherently upon her

current experience before returning yet again in Assignment #4 to the initial narrative of past experience. The importance of of such reflexive assignments is that they demand of the writer a serious effort to establish her own identity, (and by extension her authority) within the still unfamiliar worlds of the university and the text. In order to do this successfully the writer must progressively refine her knowledge and perception of herself not merely as an individual with a voice, but as a writer in a community of writers who must utilize discourse conventions if she is to establish herself in the appropriate textual community.

In order to do this, she must read as well as write, defining herself against the ideas and experiences of other writers. It is by doing this that she is able to engage with the conventions at work in other texts, and begin to manipulate them herself. We will argue that while no startling or dramatic gains are apparent in the completion of these early assignments, there are significant and discernible gains, and that these early assignments are the necessary groundwork for the next level of accomplishment.

The second group of assignments, #'s 5 through 9, are distinguished from the first by their insistance that the student move beyond the limited self-referentiality of the earlier work to address a larger context. At the same time, the student must retain the awareness of her authorial identity which will produce a tenable stance and authentic voice. In other words, the sense of herself as writer which the narrative developed

can now be carried over into other forms.

Thus, the shift from narrative to exposition in assignment #5 is crucial to the developing writer. This shift is amplified in Assignment #6 where the student is expected to write a humorous narrative. While the experience drawn upon is personal, its humorous significance can be portrayed only if the writer employs an intelligent concern with her audience, whose expectations are shaped by interpretive conventions. The seventh assignment of the series, in which the student must generate a theory of humor based on textual analysis, forces the writer to confront the social aspect of her text (not merely what is funny, but to whom), as well as the conventional aspects (how and why does the reader perceive the humor). The fact that the texts examined are those of other students in her class is important, as it allows the developing writer to engage with texts that can be intimidating because of their 'privileged' status as professional work. It also permits her to recognize that students like herself are required to work within certain conventional frameworks if their texts are to 'work' within any sort of social discourse community. In Assignment #8, when the student extends her theoretical position to a reading of a 'professional' (published, privileged) text, the expectation is that she will have become confident enough as a writer to approach the text with authority. The final assignment, in which the student develops a theory of identity is simultaneously the the most reflexive and the most interactive of all. The theory advanced by the writer must be consonant with her own

experience, and resonant with the larger cultural experience she shares with her readers.

In the first group of assignments, we have chosen to look most closely at #'s 1,2 and 4 because they seem to offer the most accessible insights into the reflexive process at work in a de-developing writer.

In her second effort at personal narrative, the writer is presenting a version of her experience which she has developed through successive revisions. The text, as it finally emerges, reveals a writer attempting to impose order on an experience which she still perceives as episodic and isolated from other events in her life, but which she realizes ought to connect if it is to have meaning within the context of that life. With this realization comes the need to see the experience as part of a larger context than her initial perception of the events as discrete and episodic will allow. Simultaneously, she begins to struggle with the problem of presenting her experience in a manner which will be meaningful to her reader. In her effort to create such a presentation she reveals her attempts to situate herself in the university community.

The first version of the narrative begins:

> Joan and I were on our way to the movies. I needed to put gas in my car so I decided to take a short cut. The road was dark, no street lights so I but my high beams on. I decided to turn my high beams off when I saw a car approaching me.
>
> The whole accident happened so fast. Joan screamed for me to stop. I didn't see it but she did. I just slammed on my brakes and held on as tight as I could. I crashed into a large mound of dirt and rubble.

In this version, the writer has attempted to lay out the bare episodic bones of her auto accident, apparently trying to give to the reader her own sense of how it occurred. Since the accident happened so fast that, in the writer's words, "I didn't see it but Joan did," there is a certain amount of inevitable confusion. Curiously, the text continues not with Joan's account, but with the writer's after the fact "analysis" of what happened, almost as if the writer, unable to rely on her own perceptions, dares not rely on anyone else's.

> Once I was outside of the car I was able to see what had happened. The road had been divided and I should have made a full ninety degree turn to my right. There were no stop signs that indicated that fact. The road was a mess there was gravel and debris every where. It looked like there had been an accident at same place recently.

The first person pronoun has by now become an oppressive feature of the text. Apparently, in approaching her own story the writer has assumed that all she needs to do is to recount her experience as if she was talking to herself. Unfortunately, this does not allow for the reader's unfamiliarity with the writer's past experience and knowledge; the writer's failure to couch her narrative in the frame of what might have been common and shared experience (i.e. the nature of her relationship with Joan, their anticipation of the evening's activity) reveals a deep ignorance on the part of the writer of what is specifically personal experience and what is the shared, common experience of people within the same culture. At this point, the only social context for the writing is the writer's consciousness, and that is a severely limiting frame.

The first two paragraphs contain a total of 98 words. Of these 98, 13 (which amounts to 13.2%) are some form of the first person singular pronoun. In the first paragraph, this pronoun is used to create a causal link between events and the writer's actions. Significantly, it is the events which affect the writer,and not the other way around. Thus, in paragraph one we find "I needed to put gas in my car so I decided to. . ." and "The road was dark. . . so I but. . ." The last sentence of the paragraph, I decided. . .when (meaning after) I saw a car" is only a slight variation in syntax on the causal pattern established in the earlier sentences.

Paragraph two merely extends the same causal pattern to cover a distance of more than one sentence. Thus, "Joan screamed. . . . I stopped," offers yet another instance of the writer being acted upon by external circumstances. It almost appears that the only way she can make order of the experience is by chronicling her successive instinctive reactions to poorly apprehended events. The "I" at the center of the text is in large measure not authoritative, but tentative.

The paragraph in which this "I" purports to analyze or reconstruct the course of the accident borders on the fraudulent, since what emerges is not an analysis of anything, but instead a description of the place. Here, the heavy use of the first person singular pronoun is rather subdued (a mere 3 out of 66 words, or 4.4%) and the chain of causality so important in the two initial paragraphs has vanished. The conclusion drawn by the writer, "I should have turned . . ." is

not fully explained. There is no "so," no sufficiently articulated causal relationship, present in the text. Without the first person, apparently, there is no causality, no coherence. The still scene has no meaning that can be articulated; events remain random.

The 'final' version of the text reveals, if not good writing, at least some important changes.

> It was a Friday night in April, Joan and I were on our way to see The Rocky Horror Picture Show. I needed to put gas in my car, the tank was almost empty as usual, so I decided to take a short cut. I had driven in this particular area only a few times, so I was not sure which street I wanted to turn down. I finally found one that looked right. After driving on it for a short time, about five minutes, I realized I had made a mistake. This road was dark, there were no street lights, so I turned on my high beams and began looking for someplace to turn around.
>
> Joan and I had not seen each other for about a month, so we were talking about what had been going on in our lives. We had grown up together, but went to different high schools, so we were taking advantage of being on Easter vacation to get caught up on our gossip. I was not paying much attention to the car, which was approaching me. Nothing seemed out of the ordinary, I was just waiting for us to pass each other so I could turn around. Joan and I just kept our conversation going.

In this version, the accident doesn't occur until the end of the fourth paragraph, and is as incomprehensible to the writer as it ever was. "I still did not realize what had happened." The introductory paragraphs, however, are revealing. Probably in response to an instructor's text the writer is now trying to provide a context for her experience which will allow her readers to share it with her. The chain of causality so crucial to the development of the earlier text is not only present, but amplified by the sort of detail which might serve

as hooks for the reader to use in engaging with the text. "Rocky Horror Picture Show," for example, is not just the name of a film but a suggestion of a particular period of time which the writer's peers would remember much as they would remember and share the experience of catching up on gossip with a friend who no longer attends the same school; all of the peer readers would at this time be experiencing that particular sensation as college freshmen even if they had missed it in high school. Another hook, "I was not paying much attention to the car, which was approaching me. . ." is not just a commonplace, but an experience shared (if not admitted) by virtually everyone who drives a car.

Although there is no successful framing of the sequence of events, the increase of detail, coupled with rigorous attention to chronology, makes the beginning of this revised narrative a more sophisticated text than its predecessor. This increased sophistication of vision is further demonstrated by the revision of the original "analysis" paragraph.

> I was still dazed from the impact, but once I was outside of the car I was able to begin to understand how the accident had happened. I was trying to piece together in my mind how I could have avoided hitting the mount, as a young man approached us. He startled me, seeming to have come from nowhere. He turned out to be the driver of the other car, he was also a security guard so he was able to call the police for us.

Here, the writer has come to a new understanding of the events of the night. She is not "able to see what had happened" but instead is "able to begin to understand how the accident had happened." The difference is significant, and although the

writer fails to explain what it is that is becoming understandable to the extent suggested by her earlier "able to see." "Able to begin" strongly suggests a more coherent view both of the events and of the written narrative. Similarly, the introduction of the young man into this paragraph is probably a mistake in terms of formal and grammatical convention, but the syntactical complexity of "He startled me, seeming to have come from nowhere" is itself startling and suggestive of a new awareness of the possibilities of language in shaping the narrative for the reader.

In both drafts of this first narrative, the writer seems to be at the mercy of chaotic experience. Her concern with chaotic event, her uneasiness with it, can hardly have been lessened by the addition to it of an assignment to write which resulted in yet another confrontation with daunting confusion. Yet the fact remains that in doing the assignment, the writer began to order her experience in a more coherent manner. It began to be possible for chaotic experience, at least chaotic experience in the past tense, to be ordered and understood by the act of recounting and revising. The writer's gains may be attributed to the repetitive nature of the assignment, since it allowed to writer to re-aproach her text with an experience of the difficulty of shaping narrative, and with the interaction of an instructor who was an interested and helpful reader. These gains, however, cannot be said to have vanquished chaos altogether since the third essay, reflecting on college life, begins with chaotic experience and with the writer reacting to external

events which are not readily comprehensible to her.

> Rutgers was a part of my life ever since I was in grade school. I moved into Piscataway when I was six years old. All through grade school and high school I had always known that I would attend college at Rutgers. I was always a very good student; I was on the honor roll all through high school, I was on the National Honor Society and I loved school. College on the other hand was a lot different than I had expected. I tried to keep up with my work but I was just so unfamiliar with the rules and procedures of college studies that all the red tape really got to me.
>
> I got so far behind in my work I did not know how to get out from under the mess I had made. I did not like school anymore. I can relate to the essays of Caroline Bird and William Zinzer. The points both of these authors brought out are not too far from my own feelings on the subject.

The approach is formulaic, and the first person singular is still hard at work establishing causal relationships in which the writer is acted upon. By paragraph #2, however, the writer attempts to establish points of contact between herself and other writers; to connect her experience of text with her experience of life. It is an extension of this effort which lends credibility to the writer's fourth essay, for now she is in part reacting to her own prior text much as she had to react to those of Zinsser and Perry. The difference is that she refers not to the text itself, but to the events it relates. Thus, her reference to the text is a complicated one. Her perception of events is now conditioned by her reading of her experience as it is encoded in her narrative.

> Everyday of our lives is a struggle, an inner struggle with our own fears in life. We use excuses as instruments of avoidance. Most people can not find the courage in themselves to overcome obstacles, because it would be too hard of a task. We are a society of extremely lazy people. It takes a great deal of self-confidence to push ourselves

to overcome our fears. I know this through one particular personal experience.

> I had an extremely distressing accident. My best friend was in the car with me and the thought that I could have hurt her troubled me. The accident was entirely my fault, caused by my lack of awareness behind the wheel. I had always considered myself a good safe driver and tried to analyze what happened to cause me to become so careless. I finally came up with the theory that I had become too relaxed for my driving skills, I took it for granted that I would not foul up. I was way too cocky for a person who had their license for only a year.

The differences between the first and second paragraphs are instructive. In the first paragraph, the writer is trying, rather desperately, to find a way into her own text by connecting the personal with the universal (or at least cultural) experience. In consequence, and because she is not sure how to manage the convention (often thought of as the "general-to-particular" convention) which would allow her to do this, she strings together a group of generalizations which are too general ("Everyday of our lives is a struggle, ..." "We use excuses as instruments. . ." and "Most people can not find the courage. . ." "It takes a great deal. . .") They are commonplaces notable for their insubstantiality. Further, no real connection is made between the judgement of society and the personal experience which is supposed to substantiate it. Much as the writer earlier moved from establishing a causal link by use of the "this-so-that" sentence so prevalent in the first narrative to implying the same link by presenting a chronological juxtaposition of events, she now attempts to link the particular and the general by means of juxtaposition without ever spelling out the nature of the relation she hopes the

reader will find. It might be pointed out that more experienced writers can have the same difficulty, frequently writing first paragraphs which must later be jettisoned when the text has found its focus.

In this particular essay, the text has found its focus not in the events of the earlier narratives, but in the significance of those events.

> My accident was like a hard slap across the face, it knocked some sense into me but it also made me afraid of driving. Next came the excuses. I did not want to drive again. My car came through with little damage, it was ready to be driven again. I just did not want to be the one who drove it. AT first I used my injuries from the accident as a way out, but after a while my father realized what was happening to me. The longer I put off driving the more likely it would be that I would never drive again, was what he thought. That was what happened to my mother. Twenty years ago she had a bad accident andshe never drove again. Was that going to happen to me?

Again, the paragraph has an appearance of disunity or disorganization. New connections are being made, however. The context of the accident is no longer purely circumscribed by the narrator's consciousness. The meaning of her friend's presence, the experience of her mother, and the concern of her father all begin to take on a new value as they become integrated into what began as an episodic and disconnected narrative. The passage offers much more richness and complexity than the writer's earlier work. The writer, whose exposition in large measure contains her narrative, has made significant progress toward becoming a writer who can make connections, but has yet to recognize that the connections cannot be forced; who sees things in an increasingly complex manner, but is not yet able to deal

with this complexity in her text. What is at work here, we would suggest, is revision of a reflexive sort refining the vision and honing the technique of a developing writer.

The importance of such reflexive or "revisionary" technique in the personal narrative assignments is that even as the writer is asked to revise her experience the light of new contexts, she is also thereby required to revise her vision of herself. She must constantly turn back on herself, try to re-see the being in her writing who emerges anew with each successive revision. One difficulty with the earlier drafts of the accident narrative seems to be the writer's lack of practice in objectifying herself, that is, creating a "self" which is able to stand in the world of the reader outside of herself. Through the process of creating a context for her experience which will allow her readers to share it with her, the writer begins to re-see the self in the essay as part of that larger context as well -- a social being operating within a social situation rather than an isolated being whose experience is confined to her own head. The space vetween the writer's immediate self and narrative self expands and begins to be populated with the experience of others who are connected with the narrative.

So far, in assignments 1 through 4, the student is beginning to see how her experience interacts with that of others: Caroline Bird, William Zinsser, her parents, and her friend. As a writer she is beginnioing to learn how to shape her experience and herself in terms of other people ("What happened

to my mother. . . was that going to happen to me?"). She has yet to see her text, though, as a text which interacts wih other texts and which is shaped by the conventions of the discourse community to which she is trying to gain entry. In her third assigned essay the writer only gets to the point of being able to "relate" personally and experientially with the essays of Bird and Zinsser. Even though her Assignment #4 revision of the car accident narrative gains in complexity through her understanding and expansion of significant connections of personal experience, the student still lacks an adequate grasp of the literary conventions which will enable her to draw lucid connections between a larger society and herself, and to create order out of the complexity she is learning to introduce to her text through her social awareness of herself. More simply, she begins to bring to her text an understanding of a larger society and how it functions outside her own experience. As the assignment sequence progresses to #5, the student makes a significant jump in connecting her experience with other texts. The first three pages of the five page essay detail her own experience of death through her mother's friend Audrey who dies of lung cancer. On the fifth page, as she begins to examine her experiences in the light of her corollary readings, she moves from a purely personal examination of herself - "I was able to accept the fact that she was gone. . . . Lewis Thomas and Elisabeth Kubler-Ross" the ent makes a rather startling leap to considering outside texts in terms of outside events, even while she locates herself in

the conderation by the act of writing about it. "Another point Thomas brought up was that most of us hope that death will just go away."

In this sentence, the writer has apparently internalized the corollary text, i.e. absorbed and colored it with her own experience and understanding, and is beginning to locate herself comfortably in the discourse.

Focus on the intertextual engagement of writing conventions evidenced by her response ot Thomas is sharpened in the two succeeding assignments. For Assignment #6 the student writes a humorous narrative (once more generated from her own experience); then, in Assignment #7, she is asked to generate a theory of humor based on textual analysis of three student essays. Humor is perhaps one of the more difficult genres in which to write, and to write about, precisely because it depends so heavily on sophisticated manipulation (or subversion) of intertextuality, narrative technique, and conventions in achieving the delicate connection between social and cultural milieu and the personal experience of the reader that results in a laugh. If the student is to understand this, she must revise her previous engagement with texts to include not just whether she personally can relate to them, but how and why the successful relation of text to audience is achieved. The introductory paragraph of the essay reads:

> Why do people laugh? What is that special something a story that makes it humorous? Different people have quite different opinions of what is funny and what isnot. This may have something to do with an aspect of personality. For example a person who is sensible in nature would most

> likely find a story or joke that is totally out of the ordinary or even bizarre funnier than a story with a bit of dirtiness to it. While others, like myself who educated in Catholic schools. feel that the dirtier the better. Personal experiences that we can relate to a story or a joke can help us to understand how a person can feel in that particular incident and how it strikes them as being funny. I also can see through the student essays that how a story is preseneted has a lot to do with the humor.

There are nice distinctions in the elucidations of these "theories" which point to the degree of the student's comfort and competence in analyzing the personal, experiential, and technical aspects of texts. Predictably, "an aspect of their own personality" rates highest, with two lengthy examples of just what the student means by this criterion. (Predictably, also, the highly personal second example is the more vivid of the two, but it also shows the degree to which the student has successfully expanded her personal self to include social context. The cultural connotations of "Catholic schools" play off nicely against "the dirtier the better" so that the example produces its own humorous overtones.) "Personal experience" comes next with a fairly lengthy and moderately clear sentence of elucidation. "How a story is presented" is dealt with in one brief sentence; the student is herself not quite cognizant of what this means, and she is wary of getting into depth beyond her present reach. The student's ability to analyze the three texts in her essay depends largely upon which of the three areas she perceives failure to lie in.

> "Simply Unforgettable" by Janine is a perfect example of my theory of personal experience, especially for students of the high school and college ages. I myself and I am sure a lot of other students have had incidents

like the one described in this essay happen to them.

So far, so good. The student again demonstrates her achieved success in breaking out of the "I" ring to include experience of her peers which she recognizes as consonant with her own. But the jubiliant tone of discovery falters when she comes to figuring out why, with personal experience in place, she yet perceives the essay to be unsuccessful as a humorous piece:

> Janine's essay other than the fact that I can relate it to personal experience of my own was not particularly funny to me, but I am only one person. To another reader this essay could be considered hilarious I think the reason why I did not find the essay funny was the fact that she varied too much in her details. She should have limited herself to what went on in the bar and just expand with as much detail as possible.

The writer begins to shrink back into the sure magic circle of isolated experience as she faces her own uncertainty in grappling with issues of narrative technique that she can't yet recognize because of her limited intertextual knowledge. She falls back on the safe and sure "use more detail" cry that echoes in all composition classrooms, without quite understanding what she actually means by detail -- it would seem from the context of her essay that she means situation -- or how it should be used. On one hand the detail varies too much, so there must be a good deal of it; on the other hand the writer of this text should have used more.

The following paragraph of her essay, which discusses the second text, is uniformly more confident in tone, as the student perceives success in it that can be specifically related to

principles of textuality that she recognizes. Personal experience makes only a brief appearance, in one sentence: "Everyone has probably had a day such as the one Colin had where nothing goes right, so I feel that a good majority of people will find this essay humorous." The rest of the paragraph focuses on "a lot of detail" that added to the humor of the story: "Adding a moral to his experience summed up how he felt about his unforgettable day instead of just letting the reader drop in the end." The student's own confidence in manipulating essay conventions in this part of her own essay is apparent. She quotes twice from the text she is discussing, and assumes the very teacherly "instead of just letting the reader drop in the end" with authority.

The student admits early that she "had a hard time" with the third text in her discussion; she did not find humorous." To her credit, she tries to be generous to her fellow student, and after bidding a regretful farewell to her standby of personal experience, she makes a real effort to understand her bewilderment in the face of an apparently impenetrable text, with some success:

> Barbara should have used more detail to explain the concept of her essay to the reader. I had never heard of a "Football Wedding" and after reading her essay I am still unsure of what exactly it is. If she had explained more carefully I'm sure I would have found the essay more humorous than I did.

Even though she falls back on her hobbyhorse of "detail", the student is using the concept more knowledgeably and to more point than in her discussion of the first text. She is up

against her own problem of six essays ago: the difficulty of establishing authorial self and context in terms which allow for the reader to establish his/her understanding as well. The student is beginning to see failure of establishing a self in the text as not just a matter of giving "more detail" about the self, as she first attempted to do in her revision of her accident essay, but also of directing that detail toward the reader. The text resulting from such revision is at least identifiable in textual terms -- in this case, a humorous essay; furthermore, the writer establishes herself identifiably in a social context which the reader can also identify and feel comfortable with, (rather than feeling like a gate-crasher at the wedding).

This essay suffers considerably from its lack of form, of a sense of forward movement controlled and created by the writer. The writer appears to hve no reason for discussing the texts in the order she chooses; the essay jumps from a partly comprehended lack of success in the discussed texts to a more fully comprehended success, to a complete breakdown of the text under discussion without establishing a connection with the reader. The first "theory" of humor is never actually used in analyzing any of the three texts, and the final paragraph of the essay is a simplified restatement of the opening paragraph. The writer still appears to be at the mercy of events (or texts) over which she has no control, but in fact some sense of control does emerge at the end.

Her "theories do not always hold true," but they are

"usable in a variety of situations." The ordering of the texts in her essay may be random, but she shows a growing ability not only to discover textual elements, such as "detail" or "moral" but to name them, identify their conventional function in the text, and to describe how they fulfill those functions both in creating authorial definition of self and intertextual definition for the reader. Competent essay writing is no longer limited to exploration of where the authorial self is situated in a larger social context, but also to how the conventions of essay writing can be used (not simply named) to establish that self.

The final essay of the series, in which the student is asked to develop a theory of identity based upon engagement with corollary texts brings together the social and intertextual definitions of the reflexive or self-referential texts with which the student has been working over the past fourteen weeks. Throughout previous assignments, the student was asked to locate herself at once more firmly and more flexibly within the social and discourse community with each successive re-revision of herself. Further, the student has been leaning how re-visions of herself can be actively shaped by her own awareness of the intertextual conventional constraints and forces which go to build her text -- her creation of herself within the discourse community. Her authorial identity has been to some extend molded by the formal and interpretive conventions at work within the universe of texts.

Her final essay illustrates that, while she still occasion-

ally gets lost in the big world "out there," she has nonetheless gained a rather strong sense of how text, intertext, and social community can be actively used to define her own place and text amongst them all. The essay begins:

> A person's self originates from a variety of influences. A piece from each source. A person pieces together a self that is acceptable to themselves and society. Each person follows a different path to their own self. They develop it, nourish it, and even change it. One self may not suit a person all of their life. Situations and influences change over time so certain characteristics of one's self must also change to accomodate the shift.

The student here exhibits at least a willingness to accept the plasticity of her position, and to be molded by "a variety of influences" -- society, situations and experiences, and texts. The second paragraph of the essay describes the different "demands and expectations" women are faced with today, television, academic schooling, and nature. Toward the end of this paragraph, the student locates the role of women in a still larger context which contains not just the influences of today, but those of a larger temporal frame.

Although her first paragraph betrays a certain uncertainty or uneasiness about how to get into her text, the second is right on target in that it introduces the social conventions which shape the formation of identity and connects them specifically with the expectations of women as a class/gender and of specific individuals (her mother and her sister) within that class.

> Society today puts a lot of demans and expectations on women. Television gives us signals that we should be sexy and appealing to men, while school pushes usto excel to the fullest of our abilities. Nature has its own way of

> telling us we should be nurturing and gives us a strong mothering instinct. All of these influences have a strong effect on a women's self. She must fill a lot of social requirements. This was not the way it was years ago. I see how in the past these influences were different. My mother and my older sister grew up in times when the societal expectations on women were completely different.

The immediacy of the writer's experience serves to define such entities as television, school ("which pushes us to excel") in terms that are strongly felt on a personal level, but which expand to include the experience of others while retaining an awareness of women's role in the society. In paragraph six, the writer continues this thread of immediacy, and makes it both overt and concrete without losing her consciousness of the larger social context, or of the importance of the conventional expectations relating to that context.

> I myself have received signals from today's society through television, school and my peers that I should be all that I can be. Television shows like "Dynasty" portray women as sexy and glamorous, whil my co-educational high school pressured me to continue my education and to have a career. To become successful is now the biggest social pressure I face. Relationships for me are more or less discouraged from becoming serious (A.k.a. leading to marriage) until I graduate from college with a degree in my hand. To drop out of college would be the biggest failure I could ever accomplish in my life right now. My situation shows some relationship to Sartre's question, "Do I owe a responsibility to all mankind?" I feel that society feels I do owe them. So I believe for myself that as Gaylin states, "The inner man is a fantasy." If I want to survive in society I must mold them a person whom they deem acceptable.

She skillfully manipulates certain textual conventions in this paragraph where she uses her personal experience to support her arguments on the larger social frame. She situates her authorial "self" directly inside the community which shares a common culture while acknowledging the convention of detail

through the specific naming of the pressures to which she is subject, and the convention of intertextual dialog integrating quotations from specific authors and articulating her own position relative to them in somewhat smoother fashion than she had been able to in her essay on death. She moves easily from Sartre to Gaylin to herself, accepting the simultaneity of constraint and empowerment which social and discourse conventions impose. She "must mold for them a person whom they deem acceptable." By now, she is able to recognize the tools by which the mold is created, and has some of the tools by which to go about creating herself. Her enthusiasm in weilding her newly discovered power leads her into the error of appropri- the conventions of one discourse and placing them in another. Detective fiction fits oddly in the expository essay, but the writer's evident satisfaction with "A.k.a. leading into marriage," in her own ability to play with modes of discourse, makes it difficult to begrudge the error.

Having dwelt on personal experiences of her mother and sister, the writer is faced with the by now familiar difficulty of integrating detailed personal narrative in the world and society. The connections sound forced and the "benefits reaped" are commonplaces; consequently the essay is brought to a less than satisfactory conclusion. In her closing, the writer is still at the mercy of framing conventions, (among them the "In conclusion" approach to summation) which she cannot quite control.

> After reading the essays by Sartre, Weinsstein, Gaylin and Benson I feel that a person's self, specifically a women's, is developed through a compromise between society and that person. With the person giving more than society. Changes in societies expectations and beliefs may also result in a change in a person's self. Women in the past were only perceived by society as housewives and mothers, but now women are supported to have it all a family and a fulfilling career.

If this is yet another variant on the "In conclusion. . ." conclusion, it is at least an appropriate convention to fall back on. With great clarity, it shows up the discrepancy between the writer's ability to name the convention and her ability to control it, as this discrepancy leads her to yet another commonplace.

Nonetheless, within the framing chaos of paragraphs 1 and 7,8,& 9 there is a unified core which is authoritatively voiced and sufficiently strong to stand as an essay. Within this core the reader finds an authorial self solidified and shaped by discourse conventions. This authorial self, created through the reflexive process of revising not merely text but the writer's position in the social and discourse communities, emerges as the source of increasingly purposeful and coherent writing.